



Letter to the Editor

22 June 2006

Dear Editor,

I refer to Health Minister Tony Abbott's comments 21 June.

It is unfortunate that again we see the blame game being played out on such a critical issue of the health of Aboriginal people. As Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), I can tell you the answer is not rocket science.

Dispossession, neglect and disadvantage has directly contributed to Aboriginal people living in conditions that are worse than third world and shackled to health outcomes that are symptomatic of that.

Making a difference will take long-term solutions that surpass four year political cycles, and understanding and acceptance that Aboriginal people want to be, and critically must be, part of the solution. Tony Abbott's suggestion fear prevents "imposing what are now seen as outside standards" is a little short sighted.

It is a little over two years ago the Howard Government abolished the only resourced, national representative voice of Aboriginal people and with it took much of the decision making away from Aboriginal people. This was to be the "new arrangements" that would make a difference. What have been the results of that experiment?

Imposing paternalistic strategies, that hand-over decision making to others might in the short term might help crunch the numbers, but it will not contribute, long-term, to the empowerment and well being of the very people that are supposed to benefit.

Yes, Aboriginal people are a critical part of the solution – but that will only come when they are engaged in finding solutions. If the Howard Government is serious about change, then they have to include the very people who are the change agents.

Chairperson,
NACCHO, Mr Henry Councillor